

Silver Fox Florist: Observations and Needs Assessment

Overview:

The observations and interviews took place over several days and included observing the typical day, typical phone call selling, and typical customer interactions. In addition to these observations, I conducted informal interviews with the owner, the designers, and the assistants, as well as some customers to determine areas of concern, views on selling, what they feel the issues were

Day 1: Observation of Customer Interactions

The focus for this day of observation was the ways in which employees and the owner interacted with customers who came into the store. I noted times for the following events: greetings, approaching customers, asking questions, and assessing needs, making suggestions, finalizing a design/order, completing the purchase, saying thank you.

I also noted the general demeanor of the customers and the employees/owner as well as the tone of voice that each used when speaking with customers. I paid attention to the types of questions asked and responses given to customer questions and requests. Finally, I noted the ways in which each step of the sale was explained or discussed with the customer as well as the conversations at the register and at the end of the sale.

Findings for Day 1: Overall, customers do not come into the store very often, usually towards the end of the day. On weekends, I was told, customers come into the store more frequently. The time it took for employees who were engaged in designing, to greet customers or drop what they were doing, and approach customers was slow. There were some customers who entered the store and were never greeted. At least two customers were not greeted, but designers shouted their station's questions such as "Do you need any help?" or "What did you come in for today." For some customers, this seemed off-putting, and they quickly left without making a purchase, even if they were previously interested.

Day 2: Observation of Phone Call selling

The focus for this day of observation was the ways in which phone calls were taken and the methods of interaction with each customer.

I noted the different greetings from each employee, the time it took for them to answer the phone, their tone of voice when speaking with customers, and the way they went through the sales process in the order management system. I also noted the ways that employees ended the calls.

Findings for Day 2: There was little continuity between the ways the employees

answered phone calls. Additionally, some employees were quick to answer calls while others would let it keep ringing until they were asked to answer. The greetings were as dissimilar as the employee and at one point, no greeting was given other than a hello, at which point the employee had to tell the store that the customer had called Silver Fox Florist. When taking phone orders, some employees were methodical in their way of speaking to the customer and using the order management system. One of the employees chose to write everything down on paper and enter the information after they got off the phone with the customer. This was a concern as they had credit card information written on paper that they simply threw away afterwards, and at least twice they forgot elements of the order and had to recall the customer. One of the employees seemed somewhat hostile towards customers and gave short, clipped answers. None of the employees used the same method of answering, taking an order, and ending the call.

Day 3: Interview with owner and some customers who came into the store.

The focus for today was an informal interview with the owner about issues they wanted to fix, and informal exit interviews with customers.

Questions I asked the owner:

1. What is your greatest concern with sales in the store?
2. Are there specific issues that you see in the store related to sales?
3. How did you engage in training with employees when you took over the business?
4. What are your expectations for customer service?
5. What are your goals for this training?
6. Was there a specific type of training you had in mind?
7. Do you think that the issue is a lack of knowledge, skill, or attitude?
8. How have you tried to fix this issue in the past?

Exit Interview Questions for Customers:

1. What brought you into the store today?
2. In one word, how would you describe your overall experience today?
3. In one word, how would you describe the level of service today?
4. In one word, how would you describe your feelings about your experience today at Silver Fox?
5. How likely are you to return to Silver Fox for your floral needs?

Findings from Day 3: The owner is very concerned about the lack of sales and return customers. She is also very concerned about low NPS scores as well as what she sees on a daily basis with her employees and customers. She was not sure what type of training she had in mind and thinks that it is not a lack of knowledge or skill that is leading to poor customer service, rather it is one of attitude.

Ten customers were interviewed today. Customers, in general, had low expectations

about coming into the store, but Silver Fox is one of the only florists in three cities, so they feel "stuck" coming in. Customers also noted that the service was "slow" and some employees seemed "annoyed" or "angry" that they had to help customers. Out of the 10 customers, 5 said they would be back again, three said they would grudgingly return because this was one of the only shops in the area, and 2 said they would not return.

Day 4 & 5: Interviews with designers and assistants

There are 5 designers and 2 assistants in the shop. I was able to interview all of them over 2 days. On average, employees had been in the floral design business for 15 years and 3 of the 5 worked for the previous owner, and two were hired after the new owner took over. The assistants both had less than a year of work in the floral business, and it was all with Silver Fox. They were hired by the new owner.

Questions I asked the Designers and Assistants:

1. Do you enjoy helping customers when they come into the store?
2. Do you enjoy speaking on the phone with customers?
3. Did you receive training in customer service, sales, or answering the phone when you were hired?
4. What are the expectations for customer service, sales, and answering the phones?
5. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Findings from the Interviews: The employees were not retrained when the new owner took over. Generally, they feel that their role is designing the arrangements not speaking to customers or answering phones. The previous owner employed desk workers who were responsible for customer service, sales, and answering the phones. Those employees quit and the new owner did not rehire new desk workers, rather she told the designers it was now part of their job, and many felt that it was not what they were being paid for. Some were frustrated with this new responsibility and 2 did not feel comfortable on the phone, using the computer, or interacting with customers in the store outside of finding out what type of flowers to put in the arrangements.

Outcomes of the Observations/Interviews:

Overall, there is a lack of communication between the owner and the employees, specifically in the area of job description and expectations. For some of the employees, there is a lack of confidence in customer interaction, the phones, or the computers. The owners must be clearer about why decisions are being made, as well as why there is a need for retraining.

The issue is a bit of knowledge about ways to interact with customers, a bit of skill with working with the computer program/phones, and definitely attitudes about the added job requirements.